

## Duncan the Pony is Flying High!



Flying High Farm of Lunenburg, MA is excited and proud to announce that our 20-year-old chestnut pony, Duncan, is the 2010 NARHA Region 1 Horse of the Year. NARHA (North American Riding for the Handicapped Association) was founded in 1969 as the North American Riding for the Handicapped Association to promote safe and effective therapeutic horseback riding throughout the United States and Canada.

Region 1 is comprised of Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Brunswick, New Hampshire, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Rhode Island and Vermont. The fact that Duncan was chosen to represent Region 1 at the National Conference is a tremendous honor!

Duncan has been working at Flying High Farm since 2004. He works alongside Christine Randle, LICSW, Sarah Charest, LICSW and James Malone, our graduate student intern. Flying High Farm is a private practice for children that utilizes equine-facilitated psychotherapy as its main form of therapeutic intervention.

Throughout his day, Duncan helps a variety of children feel better about themselves, manage their behaviors more appropriately and effectively and learn how to take care of a pony. Duncan is a “been there, done that” pony. He stands still for the kids to mount even when a child is screaming or otherwise behaving disruptively. He is ridden in a halter, lead rope and bareback pad through obstacle courses to help children learn how to follow instructions, pay attention, stay on task and be in charge of a pony.

At Flying High Farm, we utilize EFP to engage the children and increase their motivation for treatment, while also boosting their self-esteem. One boy was nervous about fire alarms. It was the beginning of school and he didn't want to go to school fearing that there would be fire drills. We talked about how the alarms need to be loud so that everyone hears them; everyone is startled by them and that is what makes people respond so quickly. The boy was riding Duncan and Duncan was experiencing allergies. Although Duncan is on medication to relieve his symptoms, he was still coughing a bit. The boy was startled when Duncan coughed. I suggested that maybe Duncan is trying to help the boy overcome his fear of fire alarms. When Duncan coughed a few more times the boy said, “See Duncan is trying to help me and I'm not afraid anymore.”

When it's too hot for riding, Duncan enjoys being bathed; in cold weather, he stands patiently while the children groom him and braid him.

Duncan's allergies and asthma have also educated our clients who are surprised to learn that a pony can have allergies and asthma. They can see the behavioral symptoms for themselves and also see how we treat him to make him feel better. Caring for a pony like this has helped some children express empathy and for others to relate to Duncan's symptoms as they themselves may suffer from allergies or asthma.

He has also been the subject of many photos taken by parents and of children's class projects. Many toy ponies named "Duncan" reside in our clients' homes. Duncan is also pictured in our social story, "Riding a Pony at Flying High Farm." Through this process, he stood patiently while we took photos (and re-took photos) of him being groomed and mounted.

Another mother commented, "It took a while for our son to warm up to Duncan, and Duncan was very tolerant and gentle during this transition. He would just sit and wait out our son's defiance or meltdowns as if it didn't phase him a bit."

The 2010 NARHA National Horse of the Year will be announced on November 6 at the NARHA Conference in Denver, Colorado. For more information about Duncan and Flying High Farm visit our website at [www.flyinghighfarm.com](http://www.flyinghighfarm.com).